



# INTELLIGENCE NOTE

BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

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KHMER REPUBLIC/UN: CAN PHNOM PENH SURVIVE  
CREDENTIALS CHALLENGE?

Since July the Albanian UN delegation in New York--at the request of Prince Sihanouk--has been sounding out possible co-sponsors for inscribing on the 28th UN General Assembly agenda a resolution calling for the expulsion of Lon Nol's delegation and the seating of Prince Sihanouk's representatives. While it is not clear whether Sihanouk will persist with this course, it is almost certain that the Khmer Republic's credentials will be challenged in both the Credentials Committee and the General Assembly, in either late September or early December. Given the improved international position of Sihanouk and his government-in-exile as a result of the recent Fourth Non-Aligned Conference in Algiers, and a possible worsening of the military situation in Cambodia, the unseating of the Khmer Republic delegation at this General Assembly is a distinct possibility.

Credentials Committee: First Battleground. The rules of the UN require that credentials must pass muster in the Credentials Committee, where the issue will be joined first. Hence, the composition of this Committee is of considerable importance. The Credentials Committee is a

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nine-man Committee appointed at the outset of every General Assembly session by the President *pro tem* of the General Assembly. In accordance with established practice, however, the President simply approves a list of nominees selected by the Secretary-General's Legal Advisor, who strives to obtain a politically and geographically balanced Committee by consulting all parties concerned. The UN General Assembly in the past always has concurred in this action.

In the present instance, the Legal Advisor's initial fears that he might have difficulty in selecting a balanced Committee that would accept Khmer credentials, as it did last year, proved groundless. His anticipation that these difficulties would originate with the People's Republic of China, whose delegation has shown a growing awareness and sophistication as well as interest in the workings of the Credentials Committee, did not materialize. Consequently, the Legal Advisor again selected a Credentials Committee with four delegates expected to vote against Khmer credentials and five in favor--with Japan holding the key position, as it did last time.

Abortive Attempt Last Year. Last year's effort to put Sihanouk's Royal Government of National Union of Khmer (GRUNK) over the top failed when the Senegalese UN mission, which had taken the lead in pushing Sihanouk's case, encountered trouble in collecting co-sponsors for a

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resolution challenging Phnom Penh's credentials. The Senegalese finally admitted that their effort to get Sihanouk into the UN was doomed in the General Assembly and, therefore, withdrew in agreement with friendly countries and upon the recommendation of Sihanouk himself. On the other hand, they proceeded to challenge the credentials of the Khmer Republic in the Credentials Committee.

That gambit failed by a margin of two because the USSR decided to abstain on the Khmer credentials issue. Subsequently, in early December 1972, the Committee's report, recommending that all credentials be accepted, was approved after the Committee rejected a Senegalese amendment, with vocal support from China and others, to take no action on the Khmer delegation's credentials. Following this defeat in the Committee, however, Senegal failed to take the issue to the Assembly floor, partly because its efforts did not receive support from certain key non-aligned delegations, such as Algeria and Tanzania, and partly because of pressure from such other non-aligned countries as Argentina. Another important factor working against Sihanouk was an effective Khmer lobbying campaign in New York and throughout the rest of the world which convinced his supporters that sentiment still favored the Lon Nol government.

Time and Tactics. In all these intricate maneuvers, timing is an important factor. For years, the General Assembly vote on the Credentials Committee's report had been postponed until late November-early December

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in order to avoid an acrimonious debate over the Chirep credentials. In principle, the Credentials Committee's report can be called at any time for Assembly approval, particularly in cases where the Committee is confronted with two sets of credentials. Thus, a challenge to the Khmer's credentials, requiring only a simple majority (68 votes) of the 135 UN members, could come as early as September or as late as December. The Lon Nol regime, naturally, would prefer to see such a confrontation later rather than earlier, as it would provide more lobbying time and also, hopefully, an abatement of the enthusiasm generated by the Algiers Non-Aligned Conference for ousting the Lon Nol regime.

Assembly Vote Uncertain. What is critical in this year's situation is the apparent slippage that the Lon Nol regime has suffered in the General Assembly. Already last year, debate on the Credentials Committee's report found a surprisingly large number of Africans speaking against the Khmer Republic and a failure of the Asians (and especially Japan) to support the Khmer in the debate. This was a bad omen despite the fact that tentative vote estimates still showed that there would have been sizable support for the Lon Nol regime had the issue been put to a vote. What is particularly troubling is that another attempt might be made to link the Khmer credentials issue with that of South Africa.

Although the two cases are dissimilar, the 1972 UN General Assembly adopted an African amendment to the Credentials Committee's report which took exception to South Africa's credentials by a margin slightly

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greater than in 1971. While representation is not the issue in South Africa's case, the danger lies in the fact that Senegal might seek again to couple the two questions in the Credentials Committee.

In the current session Lon Nol will have to overcome Sihanouk's triumph at the Non-Aligned Conference as well as the fact that a growing list of states have extended full diplomatic recognition to Sihanouk, bringing the total of those states recognizing his government to 45, 43 of which are UN members. In addition, the final political declaration from Algiers contained several statements of support for Sihanouk, declaring his regime to be the sole legitimate and legal government and calling on all non-aligned states to accord it immediate recognition.

It should be noted that Non-Aligned Conference decisions are taken by consensus, which at times is far short of unanimity. Hence, Sihanouk cannot count on the backing of all 76 participating countries of the Non-Aligned Group in New York. Nevertheless, that amorphous assemblage is showing an increasing readiness to flex its muscle, and Sihanouk undoubtedly has increased the number of his supporters who are willing to translate their support into votes at the coming UN General Assembly.

In addition, there are indications that the Chinese will work for him, probably through third parties, but it is unclear whether they are sufficiently impressed with the importance of this issue to push it to the limit. Last year they appeared reluctant to support a challenge in the Assembly. Again, though evidence is lacking, there is little

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reason to doubt that President Senghor again will press the case of his friend Sihanouk. Finally, the military situation in the Khmer Republic and the instability of the government are other crucial factors that could swing votes against the Khmer or at least into the abstention column.

On the plus side, the Khmer delegation, led by Foreign Minister Long Boret, will be lobbying widely in New York. They will be assisted by the ASEAN states -- Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Philippines -- plus Australia, which are not only concerting to work out their strategy in New York but are also planning to make a multinational statement in support of the Khmer Republic. It is questionable, however, that such a demonstration of non-recognition of Sihanouk and the GRUNK will change the votes of many African-Arab states.

Prospects. At this time, it is difficult to predict the outcome of any battle over the Khmer's credentials until the nature of the opposition's tactics is known. Reports in July indicated that Sihanouk's supporters might try to inscribe an item on the agenda of the UN General Assembly, presumably similar to the old Chirep resolution, expelling the Khmer delegation and seating Sihanouk's representatives. This tactic was shelved by Sihanouk himself last year. It also has been questioned by some of his supporters this year as being too drastic a measure for UN members to swallow, i.e., they would have to face up to the fact that

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rejection of credentials meant expulsion of the Khmer delegation. Although there is no further information that Sihanouk actually intends to pursue this approach, it is still a possibility in view of his success at the Non-Aligned Conference and a possibly deteriorating military situation.

In any event, it seems certain that a challenge will be made in the Credentials Committee, probably in the form of an amendment to the Committee's report which normally recommends acceptance of all credentials. And unlike last year, it is doubtful that a defeat in the Committee will deter Sihanouk's supporters from pressing the issue in the General Assembly, where on balance, they may well have a better chance of success.

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